

MAY 25, 1976

"THE AUCTIONER" BY JOAN SAMSON

ANNCR: THE VOICE OF AMERICA BRINGS YOU ANOTHER IN THE WEEKLY SERIES...FROM THE BOOKSHELF...A SERIES IN WHICH WE REPORT ON SOME OF THE BOOKS AMERICANS ARE READING. TODAY LINDA CASHDAN'S REPORT ON "THE AUCTIONER", A NOVEL BY JOAN SAMSON, PUBLISHED BY SIMON AND SCHUSTER: HERE IS BOOK EDITOR _____.

EDITOR: THE SCENE IS HARLOWE, NEW HAMPSHIRE, A RURAL COMMUNITY IN THE NORTHEASTERN UNITED STATES, A COMMUNITY OF FAMILY FARMS THAT HAVE BEEN HANDED DOWN FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION FOR WELL OVER A CENTURY, A COMMUNITY CLOSE TO THE BUSTLING CITIES OF THE NORTHEAST, BUT AS YET UNTOUCHED BY THEM.

JOHN MOORE AND HIS WIFE ARE TENDING TO THE CHORES ON THEIR FARM ONE AFTERNOON IN THE EARLY SPRING, WHEN BOB GORE, THE LOCAL POLICEMAN COMES TO VISIT. HE EXPLAINS THAT THERE'S GOING TO BE AN AUCTION IN TOWN. IT'S THE IDEA OF A WELL-TRAVELED, SMOOTH-TALKING STRANGER NAMED PERLY DINSMORE. THE PURPOSE IS TO RAISE MONEY TO HIRE NEW DEPUTIES FOR THE POLICE DEPARTMENT. JOHN MOORE IS SUSPICIOUS ABOUT THE STRANGER, AND SKEPTICAL ABOUT THE NEED FOR MORE DEPUTIES, BUT HE DONATES SOME OLD WAGON WHEELS TO THE AUCTION.

EDITOR: THE STAGE IS SET. IN LESS THAN FIVE PAGES, AUTHOR
(CONT) JOAN SAMSON HAS CREATED A FEELING FOR WHAT IS TO COME.
THE READER SENSES SOMETHING EVIL IS UNDERWAY,
SOMETHING THAT WILL HAVE A GREAT EFFECT ON THE MOORES.

AND THAT'S CORRECT. OVER THE NEXT TWO HUNDRED PAGES,
THE CHARISMATIC PERLY DINSMORE MANIPULATES THE PEOPLE
OF HARLOWE INTO A STATE OF TOTAL POWERLESSNESS. FIRST
HE MAKES THEM CURIOUS. THE MOORES MAKE A TRIP INTO
TOWN ONE SATURDAY, AN UNUSUAL VENTURE FOR THEM, JUST TO
SEE THE AUCTIONEER AT WORK. DESCRIBING THAT SCENE,
AUTHOR JOAN SAMSON CONVEYS A SENSE OF PERLY DINSMORE'S
COMPELLING POWER:

VOICE: "A RIPPLE OF ATTENTION PASSED THROUGH THE CROWD. ON
THE PORCH OF THE OLD FAWLES PLACE STOOD THE AUCTIONEER.
DESPITE HIS RED PLAID SHIRT OPEN AT THE NECK, THERE
WAS SOMETHING SHARPLY FORMAL ABOUT HIS STANCE WHICH SET
HIM APART FROM THE COUNTRY SATURDAY SLACKNESS OF THE
PEOPLE WAITING FOR HIM. HIS FEATURES WERE FINE AND TENSE
AND HIS SKIN WAS BURNED ALMOST AS BROWN AS HIS HAIR.
HE STOOD LOOKING OUT OVER THE CROWD, HIS HANDS IN HIS
POCKETS.

"FINALLY, A HALF SMILE OF WELCOME ON HIS LIPS, THE
AUCTIONEER MOVED DOWN HIS FRONT STEPS, ACROSS THE ROAD,
AND INTO THE CROWD BETWEEN HIS HOUSE AND THE BANDSTAND.
THE PEOPLE WERE BEGINNING TO FILL THE SEATS AND TO

VOICE: SETTLE THEMSELVES FOR THE AUCTION. THEY OPENED A WAY
(CONT) BEFORE DINSMORE, AND HE PAUSED TO NOD AND SHAKE HANDS
WITH EVERYONE FROM HARLOWE."

EDITOR: THIS MAN IS DIFFERENT. THIS MAN IS WORDLY. THIS MAN HAS
ALREADY COMMANDED THE RESPECT OF THE COMMUNITY -- THEY
"OPENED A WAY" FOR HIM TO PASS. AND THAT IS JUST THE
BEGINNING.

THE AUCTIONS BECOME WEEKLY. CONTRIBUTIONS ARE NOT
MANDATORY, BUT PECULIAR ACCIDENTS BEFALL THOSE WHO DO
NOT CONTRIBUTE. SOON THE MOORES HAVE NO FURNITURE
OR TOOLS, OR CROPS LEFT, AND THEY FEAR FOR THEIR LIVES.

THE REST OF THE TOWN IS DIVIDED INTO TWO CAMPS:
THOSE IN SIMILAR DEPRIVATION, AND THOSE WHO HAVE
BECOME "POLICE DEPUTIES". BOTH SIDES EXIST IN A STATE
OF TERROR, HELPLESS TERROR. FIRST BY CHARM, THEN BY
FEAR, PERLY COMPELS COMPDDS THE PEOPLE TO DO WHAT
HE WANTS. PIECE BY PIECE, LITTLE BY LITTLE, HE SELLS
THE POSSESSIONS OF THE TOWNSFOLK TO TOURISTS FROM THE
CITY WHO TRAVEL TO THE AUCTIONS EACH WEEK BECAUSE THEY
ARE "QUAINT." HIS ULTIMATE GOAL IS TO SELL ALL OF
HARLOWE; TO TURN THE COMMUNITY INTO A COMMERCIAL
VACATION SPOT, WHAT HE CALLS "A "BETTER PLACE FOR EVERY-
ONE."

IT IS NOT UNTIL THE END -- IN TIME TO SAVE THEIR LAND
BUT TOO LATE TO SAVE THEIR SOULS -- THAT JOHN MOORE AND
HIS NEIGHBORS UNITE TO FIGHT BACK. AND THEN THEY ARE

EDITOR: INEFFECTIVE. PERLY DINSHORE ESCAPES AND THE PEOPLE
(CONT) OF HARLOWE BURN DOWN HIS HOUSE -- WITH THEIR
POSSESSIONS IN IT -- KILLING ONE OF THEIR NEIGHBORS BY
MISTAKE BECAUSE THEY THINK HE IS DINSHORE. PERLY
DINSHORE'S EVIL IS CONTAGIOUS, AND HARLOWE'S INNOCENCE
HAS BEEN CONTAMINATED. "THE ONLY THING WE HAD TO STOP
HIM WITH WAS RIGHT," JOHN SAYS TOWARD THE END OF THE
BOOK. "NOW WE GAVE UP THAT TOO."

IS AUTHOR JOAN SAMSON SAYING "BRING BACK THE GOOD OLD
DAYS?" IN PART, YES. IN PITTING THE PEOPLE OF HARLOWE
AGAINST PERLY DINSHORE, SHE CONTRASTS THE GOOD HARD-
WORKING OLD-FASHIONED RURAL LIFE WITH TWENTIETH CENTURY

MATERIALISM. PERLY DINSHORE USURPS THE FARMERS' NEEDED
TOOLS -- BUTTER CHURNERS, FOR EXAMPLE -- AND SELLS THEM
TO TOURISTS WHO RENDER THEM USELESS, MAKING THEM INTO
DECORATIVE ITEMS -- PLANT HOLDERS -- FOR THEIR CITY
APARTMENTS. PERLY DINSHORE WANTS TO TEAR DOWN THE TREES
AND PLOW THE HILLS TO TURN HARLOWE INTO A PROFITABLE SKI
RESORT. "THE AUCTIONEER" OBVIOUSLY DEPLORES
THE COMMERCIAL FORCES OF TODAY WHICH DESTROYS THE LAND AND
THE VALUES OF THE PAST FOR FINANCIAL GRATIFICATION.

AUTHOR JOAN SAMSON HAS A POLITICAL MESSAGE TOO: BEWARE
THE CHARMS OF THE CHARISMATIC LEADER. THE PEOPLE OF
HARLOWE WILLINGLY SURRENDER THEIR RIGHTS TO PERLY
DINSHORE AT FIRST IN THE BELIEF THAT THE LOSS OF FREEDOM
IS TEMPORARY, AND THAT AS SOON AS HE ACCOMPLISHES HIS
TASK -- "FOR THE COMMON GOOD" -- THEIR RIGHTS WILL BE
RETURNED.

EDITOR: THERE ARE OTHER MESSAGES IN THIS POWERFUL LITTLE NOVEL.
(CONT)

BUT "THE AUCTIONEER"'S STRENGTH LIES IN ITS PROSE AS MUCH
AS ITS MESSAGE. JOAN SAMSON HAS WRITTEN AN ABSORBING,
SPELLBINDING MYSTERY STORY, ONE THAT UNFOLDS SLOWLY
PAGE AFTER PAGE. PERLY DINSHORE'S HYPNOTIC CHARM,
JOHN MOORE'S TRAPPED FEELINGS OF GRADUAL HELPLESSNESS,
ARE DESCRIBED SO ADROITLY THAT WE BECOME PARTICIPANTS
AS WELL AS OBSERVERS. IT IS HARD TO PUT THIS BOOK DOWN.

ANNCR: YOU'VE BEEN LISTENING TO FROM THE BOOKSHELF, REPORTS ON
BOOKS AMERICANS ARE READING. JOIN US AGAIN NEXT _____
(AT THIS TIME) FOR ANOTHER SELECTION ... FROM THE BOOKSHELF.
THIS IS _____.

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